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ART. X. — CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE.

1. — *Die treulose Witwe, eine chinesische Novelle, und ihre Wanderung durch die Weltliteratur.* Von EDUARD GRISEBACH. Dritte, umgearbeitete Auflage. Stuttgart: A. Kröner. 1877. 16mo. pp. 128.

"THE Faithless Widow"—the heroine of the very ancient Chinese tale which gives the text for Herr Grisebach's learned little monograph—was named Tiän-sche, and was a daughter of the princely house of Tiän. When she had grown into a beautiful young woman, whose face was "of the color of a milk-white icicle," there came travelling through her father's country a very learned scholar and philosopher named Tschwang-söng, who had laid aside all desire for worldly honors and was in search of Tao, the great Wisdom. Attracted by the fame of this esteemed and holy man, Tiän-sche's father gave her to him in marriage; and although the philosophic Tschwang-söng had separated himself from the things of the world forever, he was overcome by the maiden's charms, gave up for a time his search after the Tao, and established himself with his new wife in the province of Sung, in the retired region of the Nanchwa hills. Now, Tschwang-söng had been unfortunate in two previous marital experiences, and this fact had made him somewhat cynical, apparently, and had given to his numerous maxims and quotations from the Chinese classics a direction unfavorable to the female sex. Shortly after his marriage with Tiän-sche, he chanced upon an incident which confirmed these views. As he was walking one day among the hills he came upon a group of graves, and while he indulged in some of the reflections which never failed to fill his contemplative mind, he became aware that one of the graves was new, and that beside it sat a woman, fanning it. This action appeared so singular that even the philosopher was forced to smile, as he asked its reason; and his cynical soul was not less amused to learn that this was the grave of the woman's husband, to whom she had given a solemn promise that she would not marry again until the earth over his body should have grown dry. It was for this end, she explained with considerable naïveté, that she was fanning the fresh mound.

Now, Tschwang-söng was a man of great practical benevolence, and one to whom his holiness and wisdom gave such power that he was occasionally capable of something like a miracle. Taking the fan from the woman's hand, therefore, he passed it once or twice across the grave,

and, behold! the earth was dry. Then the woman was very grateful, and would have given him her silver hair-pin; but the philosopher refused it; and, accepting only the fan which he had used, he made his contemplative way homeward, and related the whole story to Tiän-sche his wife, not without some sarcastic comments which roused that lady to a warm display of feeling. "There were few women in the world," she opined, "as heartless as this one"; and as for herself, she asserted, it was not a question whether she would wait two years, or five, or many, after her lord and master's death: she never would marry again, and evenher dreams should never be of another than Tschwang-söng.

That philosopher held his peace; but at the end of a few days he suddenly grew ill and died, accompanying his last breath with the unamiable remark that his wife might now regret, that she had broken the fan he had brought home with him, for now she had nothing left to fan his grave withal. But Tiän-sche broke out into loud wailing when he died, and tore her hair, and put on mourning and sat down beside his coffin and refused to be comforted. Many guests came to comfort her and pay their respect to the dead man; and among others on the ninth day there arrived a young prince of the neighborhood, "incomparably beautiful, with lips as though they had been colored with a dragon's blood." Alas for poor Tiän-sche! It was not long before her husband's most cynical beliefs were justified; first the young prince and the widow mourned together; then they talked together; briefly, at the end of a few days, they were deeply in love, and had agreed to marry. The prince objected that it would never do to marry in their mourning garments; Tiän-sche agreed, and dressed herself in splendor. The prince objected that no marriage could have good luck that had been contracted when a coffin was in the house; Tiän-sche conceded this, and employed men to move her late husband's body to an old ruined shed. Finally all was ready for the marriage ceremony, when, as he entered the room, the beautiful young prince fell in a fit upon the threshold; and his old servant wrung his hands, and declared that the prince had had such fits before; that he had feared them, and that only one method of cure existed. Hurriedly Tiän-sche demanded what this was; it was, said the servant, part of the brain of a living man or one not yet forty days dead.

Tiän-sche's ingenuity was equal to the emergency. Taking an axe, and going out alone, she approached the side of Tschwang-söng's coffin, and burst it open with many blows. To her horror, its inmate opened his eyes, sat up, and thanked her audibly. Overcome as she was, she stammered out that she had opened the coffin because she had been thinking of stories of those whose souls sometimes returned to them

But, queried the resuscitated husband as they returned together to the house, how was it that she appeared in embroidered garments instead of those of mourning? Again she stammered that when her hopes led her to open the coffin and to think he might return to life, she did not think she should wear clothes of evil omen. "But how comes it," said the philosopher further, "that my coffin was not in my chamber, but in that tumble-down shed? Is that a happy omen?" At last the wife was silenced; and a moment after, the prince and his attendant appeared upon the threshold, and then at a sign from Tschwang-söng they vanished into thin air. Then the unhappy Tiän-sche knew that they were phantoms, and that she had no escape left her, and, taking off her embroidered girdle, she tied it to a beam and hanged herself. But Tschwang-söng, when he had burned the house and all that it contained, except the sacred books, went forth again alone on his search after the Tao.

Taking this old Chinese story as the text for his commentary, Herr Grisebach shows its theme and its general features to be almost as clearly traceable through all literatures as any of the great Aryan myths. The essay in comparative philology which he bases on this light foundation is a perfect monument of erudition, of a kind that is almost peculiar to Germany. With wonderful patience and skill Herr Grisebach has found and laid before us in this little book versions or variations of the theme of the Chinese tale in almost every language and the literature of almost every race as far back as even the philologist will dare to follow. A short treatise on the aspect of marriage among different peoples accompanies this singularly exhaustive study; and the monograph is not simply worthy of close study as an example of singular learning, and as a contribution to the science in which the author is a close and careful student, but it is most interesting to the reader, whom mere curiosity leads to follow the protean shapes of a single legend through every phase.

The reader will notice peculiarities of spelling in Herr Grisebach's book, which show him to belong to an advanced school in this matter. Chief among them is the omission of the silent *h* following a consonant in German words. Thus, he uses *tat* for *that*, *heimat* for *heimath*, *gemüte* for *gemüthe*, etc. We give these German nouns intentionally without capitals; for this method is adopted by Herr Grisebach throughout his work, giving it a singular appearance to one accustomed to the reading of ordinary German text. Double letters, also, he avoids in many cases; and even in his title uses the spelling *Witue*.